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3. Georgia and the Confederacy, 1865.

(Letters copied from the originals in private hands. Communicated by Mr. John Osborne Sumner.)

GENERAL HOWELL COBB TO SECRETARY SEDDON.

[Endorsed.]

Rec'd. Jan. 20, '65. His views regarding the policy of the war ; suggests a return to the volunteer system ; utterly opposed to arming the slaves. &c. &c.

[In another hand.]

Respectfully submitted to the President. While differing materially from the views of the within letter, my confidence in the patriotism and my respect for the judgment of Gen'l Cobb induce me to invite your consideration of it.

21 Jan. '65.

J. A. SEDDON.

MACON, Jan. 8, 1865.

HON. J. A. SEDDON,

Sec'y of War, Richmond, Va.

Sir : —

[Seddon had written him regarding pushing the conscription ; he replies he is doing all he can, but many will never be reached except by the free volunteering system which he again urges]. . . the proposition to make soldiers of our slaves, the most pernicious idea that has been suggested. It is to me a source of deep mortification and regret to see the name of that good and great man and soldier, Gen'l. R. E. Lee, given as authority for such a policy. My first hour of despondency will be the one in which that policy shall be adopted. You cannot make soldiers of slaves, nor slaves of soldiers. The moment you resort to negro soldiers your white soldiers will be lost to you, and one secret of the favor with which the proposition is received in portions of the army is the hope that when negroes go into the army *they* will be permitted to retire. It is simply a proposition to fight the balance of the war with negro troops. You can't keep white and black troops together and you can't trust negroes by themselves. It is difficult to get negroes enough for the purposes indicated in the President's message, much less [*sic*] enough for an army. Use all the negroes you can get, for all the purposes for which you need them, but don't *arm them*. The day you make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong, but they won't make soldiers. As a class they are wanting in every qualification of a soldier. Better by far to yield to the demands of England and France and abolish slavery and thereby purchase their aid, than to resort to this policy, which leads as certainly to ruin and subjugation as it is adopted. You want more soldiers and hence the proposition to take negroes into the army. Before resorting

to it, at least try every reasonable mode of getting white soldiers. I do not entertain a doubt that you can by the volunteering policy get more men into the service than you can arm. I have more fears about arms than about men. For Heaven's sake try it before you fill with gloom and despondency the hearts of many of our truest and most devoted men by resort to the suicidal policy of arming our slaves.

Having answered the inquiries of your letter, let me volunteer in a few words a suggestion. *Popularize your administration* by some just concessions to the strong convictions of public opinion. Mark you, I do not say yield to popular clamor, but concede something to the earnest convictions of an overwhelming and, I will say, an enlightened public opinion. First, Yield your opposition to volunteering in the form and manner which I have heretofore urged. Second, Restore Gen'l Johnston to the command of the army of Tennessee and return Gen'l Beauregard to South Carolina. With Lee in Virginia, Johnston here and Beauregard in South Carolina, you restore confidence and at once revive the hopes of the people. At present I regret to say that gloom and despondency rule the hour, and bitter opposition to the administration mingled with disaffection and disloyalty is manifesting itself. With a dash of the pen, the President can revolutionize this state of things and I earnestly beseech him to do it.

Sincerely yours,

HOWELL COBB, Maj. Gen'l.

GENERAL HOWELL COBB TO PRESIDENT DAVIS.

AUGUSTA, 20 Jan'y, 1865.

Private and confidential.

HON. JEFFERSON DAVIS,
Presd't, etc.,
Richmond, Va.

Dear Sir :

It gives me no pleasure to write this letter, but it is my duty both to you and our cause, to say what I am about to say. In a former letter I expressed the opinion that the prevailing sentiment in this state would in the end become true and loyal. I regret to say that the feeling becomes more and more disloyal every day. I am unwilling even now to write the extent of disaffection which exists and is spreading every hour. It could not be worse. I meet every day the men whom I regarded as the last to yield, who come to me to represent their helplessness and despair. I meet those whom I know have been the warm and earnest supporters of your administration, and find them, not in open hostility, but deeply disaffected, and under the cloud which our reverses have brought upon us. Let me say to you in all candor and frankness that the opposition to your administration has become so general that you know not whom to look upon as a friend and supporter. I tell you unpleasant truths, but you should know them — for the crisis demands that you should be honestly informed of the

true state of things. Many of the causes which have produced this state of things are beyond your personal control—such as the conduct of the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments in the failure to supply them with money, and the conduct of inefficient subordinates who have too often taken more pains to trample upon the feelings and rights of citizens than to do their duty. All this is past immediate remedy. But, Mr. President, there are things which you can do, and which I again urge and press you to do. First, respond to the urgent, overwhelming public feeling in favor of the restoration of General Johnston. I assure you that your refusal to do this is doing you more harm and producing more opposition to your administration than you dream of. Better that you put him in command—admitting him to be as deficient in qualities of a general as you or any one else may suppose—than to resist a public sentiment which is weakening your strength and destroying your powers of usefulness.

Second, rest assured that the conscription law has done its work, and you cannot maintain your army if you look to that law to furnish security. The law is odious, and cannot be enforced in the present state of public feeling. I will not repeat what I have heretofore urged as the proper remedy, but will only say that the time is fast passing when anything can be done by volunteering.

This brings me to the main object I have in writing you at this time. By accident I have become possessed of the facts in reference to the proposed action of the Governors of certain States—you have doubtless heard something of it—in connection with the proposed State conventions. There is such a project under discussion. Some who started this movement are urging State conventions, that steps may be taken to take the control of affairs out of your hands. Others favor the movement because they believe it will lead to peace, and they are willing—and I believe anxious—for peace, even upon terms of reconstruction; and in the present state of feeling, if a convention should be called in Georgia, it would be an unconditional submission concern. Whilst these opinions and views are entertained by some—perhaps many—who favor these State conventions, the movement will not be sustained to that extent, as far as I know or believe, by any State executive. *At present* the Governor of this State is opposed to the call of a convention, and will continue opposed to it as long as it is his interest to be so, and *no longer*. Of other Governors I cannot speak, but I have no idea that any of them will *now* favor a convention. My opinion is that they will do this—and I communicate it that you may fully appreciate its importance, if it turns out as I expect;—they will address you an earnest appeal for a change of policy on the part of the Confederate government, on the subject of the conscription laws, impressments, etc., etc. If I have been correctly informed, their efforts will be mainly directed to the point of recruiting the army, and will look to the volunteering system and to the State machinery for that purpose. Whilst I have no sympathy—as you well know—with those who have made war upon your administration,—I do not hesitate to say to you that

the safety of the country and the success of our cause require concessions from you on these subjects. The time has come when we must do — not what we prefer, but what is best for the country, and you underestimate the dangers by which we are surrounded if you attribute this perhaps unwelcome communication to any other motive than a sincere desire to advance the cause more dear to me than life itself.

I am, with sentiments of sincere regard,
Very truly yours, etc.,

HOWELL COBB.

SENATOR B. H. HILL TO PRESIDENT DAVIS.

LA GRANGE, GA., Mar. 25, '65.

My dear Sir:—

As we have been receiving no mails from Richmond, I take it for granted none are going from here to Richmond and therefore have not written often. I now take an opportunity of sending this by safe hand and will write a short letter.

The feeling is evidently improving in Georgia, and my information is that very many absentees are returning to their commands.

The very day the Governor's message was sent in, I made prompt and direct issue with him on the subject of calling a Convention. On the first proposition to call a Convention, there were but two *yeas* in the House. The question was changed and assumed the form of a proposition to refer the decision of "Convention" or "no Convention" to the people. In this form it received more votes but was still voted down by a very decided majority.

The disappointed faction then threatened to agitate for the call before the people, pleading the movement in Texas as a precedent. But as that was a call *without* authority of the legislature, and this would be a movement *against* that authority, they find themselves as destitute of precedent as they are of principle and patriotism in making the movement. I am satisfied it is effectually dead, and I have ceased to discuss it in my addresses to the people.

I am fully satisfied Gov. Brown's message was the first step of a concerted movement to inaugurate another revolution, and as such I feel happy in its prompt and decided defeat. Mr. Stephens (Vice-President) made no speech at all. His brother was earnest for the Convention, and the whole influence of both was in that scale, and is included in the defeat. The Senate passed strong resolutions, with only two dissenting voices, for a vigorous prosecution of the war. They were not voted on by the House; for what reason I have not learned, as I had to leave Macon, and did not get back before the adjournment. I know they would have passed almost unanimously.

Best of all, our people are rapidly improving, and I do hope Georgia will be a source of no further trouble. The people were always right, but

a few bad, disappointed, prominent men, with the control of several papers have been able to make much noise.

I think even Brown cannot convince the people that he will act "in cordial cooperation" with the Confederate authorities again, and I now look confidently to his defeat in October next.

Nothing gives me more pain than the conduct of Mr. Stephens. He was under every obligation of honor and patriotism, after the failure at Hampton Roads, to raise his voice and urge our people to a vigorous renewal of the war spirit. He has not done so, and I will not venture even in a private letter to express my utter abhorrence of the man's conduct. He has been a weight for two years and seems determined to remain one. As I urged you to put him on the commission, and as you were kind enough to tell me my opinions and wishes influenced the Cabinet in the matter, I will say that as it has turned out, nothing was ever more fortunate. His failure has at least *silenced his* pernicious tongue about "brains" and has made true active patriots of many of his heretofore deluded followers.

I am deeply pained with the action of the Senate upon your frank message, as that action is reported to us by telegraph. I fear poor Wigfall has gone the way all such men go, abandoned principle to satisfy his private ungrounded hate. Why don't such men as Wigfall, and Stephens and Brown learn a lesson from the fate of their friend Foote? Poor Foote! he has fallen, but he was the very best man of the party, and fell first only because he was most honest. Bad men, like water, will find their level one day. I felt very badly, in view of my absence, when I saw the action of the Senate, but I could not get back, and I know my visit here has done good.

I know your labors are heavy, and your trials and vexations are numerous, and often I find myself wishing I could do or say something to aid you. A great cause is in your hands, and many who ought to hold up your hands are pressing them down. And as disasters fall upon us these men press the harder against you.

But pardon me for saying be of good cheer, we shall conquer all enemies yet and best of all is the sweet consciousness of duty fully discharged, which I know will be your comfort and joy in any event.

I shall continue to address the people and endeavor to encourage them to stand to their duty whatever disasters may befall us. Mr. Lincoln's meanest detachment is here in Georgia, but they will be unable to carry the State away.

I have no thought or desire now but to help win this fight. If there is any work in my power to do during this recess of the Congress, I will most freely undertake it. Understand, I will have no reward or any position. All I ask is to *serve*, in any way, consistent with the position I already hold. I will go to Richmond, or to the army, or anywhere I may possibly be able to do good, and no private or personal interest or comfort shall stand in the way.

Pardon me for writing so freely to you. It is the *Country* I wish to serve, and it does seem to me there never was a time when any country more needed the services of all her children, and I simply desire to place mine at your disposal. I do feel a strengthening faith that we shall succeed, and while I feel deeply solicitous to hold Richmond, yet even its fall will not weaken my faith or lessen my efforts.

I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of the speech which I made at this place to my neighbors. I do not expect you to have time to read it, but it can do no harm to send it. It is an humble effort, as all my efforts must be, but never did the heart more honestly applaud what the mind conceived and the tongue uttered.

Forgive me also, for so long a trespass on your time.

Our people do and will continue to support you and may God sustain you.

Most sincerely yours,

B. H. HILL.

The President.